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THE COLLEGE, THE GIRL AND THE PARENT.

BY MARION TALBOT.

THE story of the struggle of young womanhood against the arbitrary and artificial restraints of society is an old one, but not much thought or pity has been given to it in the past. The world has uttered many a word of scorn and contempt for those young women who have sought wider scope for their activities and proven unequal to the struggle. It has given belated praise to its rare Elizabeths or Joans and lauded them as saints or heroines. Through the centuries the struggle has gone on, but only in late years has there come some realization of the human problem involved and some glimmering of the significance to human welfare of allowing every member of the race, regardless of sex, the fullest and freest expression.

The cry has gone forth from time to time. History and literature alike testify to the struggle. One of the most striking appeals in behalf of young womanhood is that of Charlotte Brontë which she makes through her heroine, Caroline Helstone in "Shirley":

"I believe single women should have more to do—better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they now possess. . . . The girls in this neighborhood have no earthly employment but household work and sewing; no earthly pleasure but an unprofitable visiting; and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better. . . . The fathers observe their manœuvres (for husbands); they order them to stay at home, to sew and cook. They expect them to do this, and this only, contentedly, regularly, uncomplainingly, all their lives long, as if they had no germs of faculties for anything else: a doctrine as reasonable to hold, as it would be that the fathers have no faculties but for eating what their daughters cook or for wearing what they sew.

. . . . . .

"Seek for your daughters an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manœuvrer, the mischief-making

tale-bearer. Keep your girls' minds narrow and fettered—they will still be a plague and a care, sometimes a disgrace to you; cultivate them—give them scope and work—they will be your gayest companions in health, your tenderest nurses in sickness, your most faithful prop in age."

Not long ago a prominent physician, president of an active and influential civic organization of men, in addressing a group of women assembled to consider the desirability of organizing a Women's City Club, described in vivid language the host of well-trained and energetic girls just out of college, eager to use their powers and yet hedged in by social conventions and arbitrary restrictions. He portrayed on the one hand the wide range of civic and social work needing the sympathetic and wise co-operation of such young women and on the other hand the piteous waste and tragic loss involved in the failure to give these eager young souls an opportunity to join in the work of the world worthy of their ability and their ideals. From his professional experience he testified also to the physical and nervous wreckage resulting from the chafing against the bars of so-called social proprieties or from the attempt to give expression to executive ability, intellectual power, and social gifts through the vapid and meaningless potherings of society.

Since Miss Brontë wrote there have been many changes in the life of women, notably in opportunities for intellectual enrichment, in domestic industries, in vocational employments open to women and in the social standing given to unmarried women.

In nearly every civilized land not only the elementary and secondary schools are open to girls, but the colleges, universities, professional and even technical schools admit them with more or less freedom to all the courses offered. It is recognized that "woman, having received from her Creator the same intellectual constitution as man, has the same right to intellectual culture and development."

Domestic industries which formerly made the home a centre of production with the woman directing the processes have now gone into factories. The effort to retain them as a means of utilizing the energy of women does not commend itself to the woman of economic instinct. The factory-made flour is not only better, but in every real sense cheaper than the home-ground meal and the same is increasingly true of many articles of food and clothing. The well and the bucket, the brick oven and the

spit-iron, the tinder-box and the tallow candle, the spinning-wheel and the loom, the mortar and the pestle, the soap-kettle and even the needle and the scrubbing-brush, have given way under the improvements made possible by modern mechanical inventions. Those who exalt the importance of woman's work within the home and lament that women are not content to remain at home to do it ignore the fact that there is comparatively little of it left to be done. Even many of the elements of education, the sanitary control, the supplying of reading and amusements,—the interests which formerly called for her most intelligent and her constant endeavor, have now in large measure passed into other and usually more competent and better-trained hands.

The time and strength of women which have been set free as the result of changes in the industrial system, mechanical improvements and the socialization of many interests which were formerly carried on solely within the home, are finding chance for expression in a wide range of civic, philanthropic and social activities. These new duties and opportunities are concerned not merely with the well-being of the community as a whole, but with every individual household in the group. They are assuming more and more a professional or technical character demanding special gifts and careful training, both general and specific. When added to the professions and industrial pursuits which have been gradually claiming the interest of women it is clear that the disappearance of domestic activity does not by any means imply idleness other than that enforced by the indolence of the individual or by the restrictions set up by the family and friends.

"Old maid" is no longer a term of opprobrium and scorn. Higher ideals of marriage and the increase in the economic independence of women which, in the words of a conservative English economist, "strengthens their position in what to most of them seems the principal bargain in life" (marriage) have brought about a radical change in the popular estimate of the woman who remains unmarried, in most cases, undoubtedly, of her own choice.

In the light of such considerations as these it is worth while to give serious attention to a problem which is involved in the education of women, and which in the judgment of many educators has passed beyond the personal domain and become a matter of public concern. In former times the relation of the daughter to her parents and particularly to her father was one of de-

pendence and submissive obedience. With her new intellectual attainment her wider outlook upon life and her greater consciousness of her powers and more eager desire to use them, there has arisen a new situation. The parents are frequently unable to cope with it or even to understand it and the young woman often finds herself quite powerless to shape her course in a way satisfactory either to her parents or to herself.

A more detailed analysis of the conditions may reveal more clearly what the difficulties are and possibly indicate some means of solving or even of preventing them.

In the first place it should be pointed out that as the problem is one which affects the young woman in her home relations it does not concern all young college women. There are many young girls, although not as many proportionately as in former years, who, when they go to college, have no family ties or whose families openly recognize that under the pressure of pecuniary need the family relations must inevitably be subordinated to the demands of making a living, and may even have to be ignored entirely. In such cases there is little occasion for comment. The young woman looks upon her college course as a means of earning a livelihood and of lightening the family burden by providing for her own self-support. She then enters upon a work which removes her from the family group as completely as if she married and left home and with as little discussion or criticism. An increasingly larger number of girls, however, enter upon their college training with no such future certainly before them. In general these girls may be divided into two large classes—first, those who are entirely free from economic pressure and who are given four years of life in college for the sake of the pleasure and social experience as well as for the more extended education, and, second, those who cannot look upon their college training as a mere intellectual and social indulgence, but will be expected to make some practical use of it in after years.

In like manner the attitude of the parents to the daughter may be described roughly as belonging to two types, although the types do not correspond to the two classes of girls but more or less overlap. In one type of family there is intelligent appreciation of the fact that with development, experience, training and maturity there have entered into the daughter's life new factors to be dealt with and that it is still the parental function to enter

with sympathy and interest into the child's concerns and to take pride and pleasure in opening up opportunities for the exercise of those qualities which it has been the object of the years of training to strengthen. In such families no real problem presents itself except when an exceptionally selfish nature on the part of the girl, fostered by indulgence and weakness on the part of the parents, makes exactions from them which are utterly unreasonable. As a rule the intelligent daughter is ready to contribute at least her share to the well-being of the group as a whole and of her parents individually while the parents on their side recognize the wrong that lies in the attempt to merge the daughter's individuality completely in the life of the group.

The other type of parents may be subdivided into two classes —first, those who through ignorance and, second, those who through selfishness expect and demand from the daughter on the completion of her college course the entire abandonment of her personal interests, the abnegation of her individual judgment and desires. It is here that the problem exists whose solution demands the greatest skill and wisdom, if indeed it is ever found, and whose existence bears with it a train of suffering, unhappiness and even tragedy from which parents and daughter suffer alike, often in silence, sometimes, unfortunately, with open rancor.

Before attempting to suggest a method of dealing with the problem it may be well to restate briefly the factors which compose it. On the one hand are the parents who have gladly given to the daughter and sometimes forced upon her the opportunity for a wider training. On the other hand is the daughter with her awakened faculties compelled after the four years of absorbing college interests to reorder her life, to establish new connections and to find an outlet for her activities. She finds in her parents what she recognizes as an unduly exalted pride in her attainments and achievements, either complete ignorance, through lack of personal experience, of what the college training really signifies to her, or a more or less frankly expressed sense of relief that "now the college course is over she can settle down at home and be of some use there." She can at last justify the father's desire for "conspicuous consumption" by adding to his entourage a daughter with leisure to spend on personal attractiveness or in acquiring social prestige. She can relieve the mother's burdens by taking her place occasionally in household and social matters. Her ex-

penses are cheerfully paid provided they are of moderate amount. She takes turn about with her mother in doing the marketing or ordering or preparing the meals, she is given partial control over the younger children and possibly the servants, but always with the realization that her mother as the actual mistress of the household may at any time step in and overrule her decisions. The third factor in the problem is the circle of friends and acquaintances who look with some degree of awe and reverence on the girl and her achievements, sometimes place her metaphorically upon a pedestal and yet are free in their criticism and harsh in their judgment if she shows any evidence that she has added capacity or different ideals as a result of her absence from the home town. There is forthwith a widely expressed opinion that a college education simply results in educating a girl "out of her sphere" and that she and everybody else would be very much happier if she did not know so much more than her family and her neighbors.

A few cases drawn from real life will serve to illustrate more clearly the difficulties which have been suggested and the problem involved.

A prosperous but not educated farmer has allowed his three daughters to go through the State University. They have strong, vigorous bodies and alert minds. Every law of hygiene demands that both body and mind should be given the exercise for which they have been fitted. The family have moved from the country into a small town and the father has retired from active labor and is engaged in husbanding his goodly store of property. The household is run on the frugal principles to which the parents have become habituated during their years of struggle. The women of the town find their chief interests outside of their kitchens in discussing the latest styles of dress as shown in the fashion-books or in so-called "women's columns." A woman's club, at which papers on Dickens or Longfellow are read, showy but unmusical "pieces" are given with instrument or voice, and elaborate refreshments are served, is the only form of social organization outside of the church which is open to women. It is not considered good form for young ladies of the upper circles to engage in any athletic sports or exercise more vigorously than to take an occasional drive in a carriage. Bridge whist is the all-absorbing amusement and a knowledge of the latest arts of

the hairdresser or skin doctor is a *sine qua non* for success in polite society. The daughters are baffled by the situation. The father forgets that they are grown women and in his old-time imperious manner dictates the hours for their rising and bed-going, sees no reason for their having any money to spend since he is satisfying all their real needs, looks askance on any young men whom they may chance to meet, urges them to help with the cooking and take pride in sweeping the porch, and tells them, when they suggest taking advantage of the town's new water and sewerage system and having a bath-room put in the house, that "what has been good enough for your mother and me is good enough for you." The mother meanwhile has not lost her power of understanding, and as a means of furnishing her girls some outlet for their ability, in rather a furtive way allows them to assume the charge of the housekeeping. They are given an allowance on which to run the household. But their imagined liberty proves to be a chimera. Their purchases of food are never entirely satisfactory and the climax of the situation is reached when they are severely rebuked for spending money for the purchase of new table linen when the old might still have been darned and patched a few more times. In open but quiet revolt they leave home to seek their fortunes, and the father and mother with shaking of the head and doubtless some throbbing of the heart settle down in quiet in the old ways, while the gossips of the town sympathize with them and have little but contumely for their eccentric children.

The daughter of a man in very moderate circumstances has alternately taught and studied and has finally been given a year's leave of absence which she has spent in specializing in her favorite subject, Latin, and in securing her degree. She has received offers of two positions. One is to take the principalship of the school in which she has lately taught. The salary is a thousand dollars, she is to succeed a Harvard graduate and she will be within such distance of her home that she can make a weekly visit. The work is not only uncongenial, but so hard and exacting that it was given up by the man largely on that account, and she foresees that if she undertakes it she will not only be very unhappy, but at the end of a few years be physically and nervously exhausted. Her father, however, thinks that she should accept the position not only for the reasons that the salary is high and that it is a great distinction to succeed a man, but because she will be

enabled to come to him whenever he needs her. This point especially he urges with a force which appeals strongly to her deep affection for him. The other position at a salary of eight hundred dollars is to teach Latin only, with fewer hours of work a day and less responsibility, with the probability that she would have an opportunity to go on with her studies and to be called to more remunerative positions later. The distance from home is such that she would not be able to return except at very rare intervals. She believes that her father is engrossed in his affairs and does not really need her, but that in years to come when his vigor fails she must be ready to give him comfort and support, and for this she will need to husband her own strength. Her only sister has after years of struggle refused longer to accept her father's will as the final arbiter of her life and has left home. Such another break is abhorrent to the girl. She faces these alternatives,—decision which will ultimately give herself and her father the greatest satisfaction or an acquiescence in his judgment which will bring outward peace for the present and for as long as she is willing to yield to his decisions, which are likely to grow more exacting and frequent as he grows older and less vigorous.

Many other cases might be cited. Each would seem to have its individual aspects and be a problem by itself needing its own peculiar solution, unless one were content to generalize to the extent of saying that if the principle of filial obedience, or filial reverence or filial affection, were given its proper recognition and applied regardless of all other considerations, no problem at all would exist. But no one is able to take so extreme a view at the present time, and indeed it is not necessary. There is one factor that is common to all the cases and that is the ignorant parent, for, after all, selfishness in these cases may be explained as the result of ignorance. And the solution rests with the elimination of ignorance on the part of the parent.

It is just here that a mistaken policy on the part of those responsible for the methods of the school has too often prevailed. It is trite to say that the school and the family do not co-operate with sufficient sympathy and intelligence, and yet the effort is not always made. How often one hears such remarks as "if only we did not have to bother with the parents we could accomplish something," or "if only there weren't a father and mother something could be made of the child." But certainly when it comes to

students of college age the great wonder of those engaged in administrative work is that in most cases there is no chance to deal with the parents at all except in most superficial and general matters. The absolute confidence with which the average parent turns over his child to a college is startling. When a puzzling case demands the special attention of a college officer he often longs to have the interest if not the wisdom of the parents. A knowledge of home conditions and traditions would throw light in dark places, and yet it is often impossible to make the connection with the parent. There are in general two reasons for this. It is a striking fact familiar to those engaged in the collegiate movement that a very large number of college girls are daughters of parents who have had very limited education of a formal character. They look upon the college with awe and regard the college officers with reverence. They have no background of experience to use in bringing them into close and advisory relations with their daughters and the new life. And, of course, the lapse of time simply means a still smaller power to co-operate actively in the new educational process.

Other parents turn over their children to the college because of indifference or absorption in other interests. The result in all of these cases is likely to be that which has already been described. The parent is quite at a loss to know what his child needs and the process of adjustment is one of irritation and disappointment on both sides.

There is, however, no reason why an attempt should not be made by the college authorities first to secure at least the interest if not the intelligent co-operation of the parents throughout the daughter's career in college, and second to encourage her to gratify her parents in any interest they may show in her activities, even though it may not be immediately helpful, and to do all in her power to make them feel that in giving her the new opportunities they have a deep and vital concern in the outcome. Every college officer feels a thrill of delight and a new sense of his responsibility after an interview with a parent who, however timid and self-depreciatory, recognizes that in spite of his educational shortcomings he can by co-operation with the college authorities make a direct contribution towards his daughter's welfare. Although at first thought it may not seem to be the fact, this view of the parental relation is actually in accord with the opinion

commonly held by experienced college educators, that college students are not to be treated as irresponsible children, but as young folk approaching maturity and profiting by the experience of acting according to their own judgment. The help of the parent is not to be sought as a means of securing dogmatic authority, but as a source of sympathy and co-operation.

As the circumstances and the needs vary with individual cases, it is futile to lay down any specific lines of procedure. General principles may, however, be recognized. In the first place, it is the duty of the college to strengthen, not to destroy or even to weaken, the family tie. Every possible social and educational influence should be called upon to develop the lasting virtues of the family relation, although many of its attributes, once prized, now outworn and useless, are rapidly disappearing. In the second place, the natural and rational method of maintaining the interest of the parent is to have the child encouraged or perhaps compelled to formulate some acceptable reason for taking a college course and incidentally to plan for her future life. In most cases the parent will accompany the child step by step in sympathy and understanding, and, instead of having a wide and almost impassable gulf between them, as too often happens when the college course is finished, both parents and child will then find that although their activities may take different forms, they remain close together in spirit and mutual understanding. The daughter will find herself a truly essential factor in the home life and, on the other hand, the parents will rejoice that in spite of their waning powers they can still be vitally in touch with interests that appeal to them.

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